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School District Policing in the 21st Century



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ABSTRACT

School district policing is a unique profession in the 21st Century. Police officers working in a school district environment will set the stage for a safe learning environment and be a positive asset in the school district communities. The mere presence of police officers should reduce the potential for criminal activity and should reduce response time that will help gain the confidence and trust from their customers. Law enforcement should be in schools to help decrease violence such as bullying, gang activity, and shootings. In addition, law enforcement agencies will offer community policing designed for the 21st Century, as well as help create a safe learning environment, which is the primary cause of implementing school district policing.

Community policing is the key for crime reduction and reducing communication barriers through educating students, parents, staff, and their communities with presentations. Reaching out to civic clubs, town hall meetings, and monthly meetings on school campuses will be an opportunity for offering feedback for everyday activities. Collaborating with local and county law enforcement agencies is a necessity for school district law enforcement agencies, as well as bridging the gaps with local agencies through memorandums of understanding to ensure all resources are available for everyday functions.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement should be in schools to help decrease violence, such as bullying, gang activity, and shootings. In addition, law enforcement agencies will offer community policing designed for the 21st Century to help create a safe learning environment, which is the primary cause of implementing school district policing. School policing has played a role in schools for several decades; however, in today's society, school district policing has become one of America's most observed professions. Law enforcement agencies are offering more than safety to America's future; school district policing is innovative, creative, and has managed to gain the confidence of their customers. Due to the school shootings that occurred in the late 1990's, many schools are choosing to implement law enforcement agencies on their campuses. However, some do not want law enforcement on campuses. The National School Safety and Security Services stated that opponents often believe this creates an "armed camp" environment ("School resource officer," n.d.).

For years, parents have traveled to work wondering if their children are safe; however, with law enforcement in schools, parents are confident that their students are learning and achieving their ultimate goal. The Clark County School District Police Department mission statement is in compliance with school district law enforcement in the 21st Century. It is the mission of the Clark County School District Police Department to provide a healthy learning environment that is satisfying and comfortable to students, teachers, staff, and gains the trust of all statuses within their county ("Mission of the CCSD," n.d.).

Law enforcement agencies in schools are taking the time to intervene with students by offering educational enforcement that assists students traveling within their communities, as well as presenting various programs to educate students that will help better serve their schools and neighborhoods. Some of these intervention programs include a focus on bullying, role models, crime reduction, and offering detailed community involvement strategies that eliminate a treat to life. In the past, crime awareness was only offered to adults, civic clubs, teachers, and school administration; however, today, students are school district policing's number one client.

School district policing should be an essential management component for public schools. Law enforcement in schools allows the municipality police to remain in their communities, as well as to respond quickly to incidents occurring within communities and to stakeholders. Law enforcement will eliminate potential problems due to their distinguished uniforms both in classrooms and school premises. Utilizing law enforcement and their resources will create safe learning environments in more ways than one.

POSITION

One reason why law enforcement agencies should be implemented into schools is to reduce violence. According to Kuo and Gast (2010), "At a Bay District school board meeting in Florida, a 56 year old man "spray painted a red "V" with a circle around it on the wall, brandished a small-caliber handgun and ordered the room cleared" (para. 3). Clay Duke later engaged in cross-fire with a retired police officer attending the board meeting that brought this incident to a closure. If there had not been a police officer at this Panama City school board meeting, Clay may have caused

extensive bodily harm. This explains why police officers should work in schools and patrol their properties. School districts that have implemented law enforcement agencies in schools have proven to be proactive and effective, which has created positive learning environments for students. The daily operations of school police law enforcement have proven to be within the scope of law enforcement functions.

According to a national survey from the role of law enforcement in public school safety stated, "Overall, students, parents, and staff were supportive of having police in their school (Travis & Coon, 2005, para. 2).

In the 21st century, police departments are now working to be proactive versus reactive. Street gangs are growing faster than other forms of gangs in the United States; these gangs can appear both in the inner-city and in the suburbs. Gang issues are taking place in communities on a daily basis; however, gang violence overlaps in both schools and neighborhoods. Gang members are students, too; gang members have direct contact with each other en route to school, restrooms, school cafeterias, hallways, classrooms, and en route to their homes. Gang activity is a potential threat to students, parents, teachers, and school property. Analysis has been made available for public view in outlining findings from law enforcement agencies on federal, state, and local levels about the number of active gang members in the United States and along the Southwest border (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Gangs are also often involved with violent crime. Some examples of violent crime includes human trafficking, drugs, auto theft, murder, guns, robbery, and other violent crime throughout the Texas Gulf Coast and Mexico. Training for gang awareness is essential in law enforcement. The Texas Gang Association (TGIA) provides up-to-date training for law enforcement

professions, but it is not limited to peace officers. Their conferences provide a variety of training such as: violence intervention, the many faces of criminal and death saints, and street survival seminar ("Training," n.d.). TGIA has too much to talk about with gangs; therefore, taking the appropriate steps in preparing school district police officers for gang activity is a proactive step in protecting students, teachers, parents, and their communities.

In recent years, bullying has created an uncomfortable school environment. Innocent students are taking measures of attempting to commit suicide due to embarrassment and becoming victims of bullying. Pochman (n.d.) claimed that "The National Center for Education Statistics has found that most bullying takes place on school grounds and that the presence of law enforcement on school grounds correlates with lower incidences of bullying, these areas often include playgrounds, restrooms and lunchrooms" (para. 6). With the mere presence of law enforcement in schools, police officers will deter and educate innocent students in handling unwelcome approach of bullies and their unwanted presence. During a normal day at a Houston, Texas area school, an elementary student attempted to suicide in front of his peers by leaping from a two story balcony. This student's mother stated that "My son has dyslexia; they call him stupid and dumb" ("Boy, 8, attempts suicide," 2010).

Another reason why school districts should implement law enforcement agencies is that it will help decrease bullying. Bullying is considered harassment in most states and harassment is a class (C) misdemeanor that is enforceable by law enforcement agencies; however, many incidents are not being reported due to the fact that school officials are handling these incidents at an administrative level. School officials cannot

enforce federal, state, and local laws; therefore, with a sworn peace officer in the presence of students, teachers, and other officials, the school community will have direct contact with law enforcement agencies and the court systems. A local school in Pickerington, Ohio stated that “Their district would continue anti-bullying efforts in light of a former student who attempted suicide” (“After suicide,” 2011, para. 1). School officials released this information to parents within the Pickerington community.

In addition, implementing law enforcement agencies will decrease violence in schools. The 1990’s school shooting was a major factor in America that left many students dead, injured, and shocked over a massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado. In another example, “Six people were shot on the field of a southeast Houston high school during a “powder puff” football game. Police believed it was in retaliation for other recent gang-related shootings” (“One dead,” 2011, para. 2). Imagine a friendly “powder puff” football game having such a dramatic finish on the football field. As a final example, a prior gang-related shooting took place at an annual event located at Reliant Stadium for the Houston’s Live Stock Show and Rodeo. Many criminal incidents may take place at public events and finalize on school campuses. One student stated that there was “too many people and I couldn’t tell who had a gun. I was running for my life” (“One dead,” 2011, para. 5). Also, community members stated that, “Citizens in the nearby community acknowledged a recent incident that may have been related at a city wide event. Also, gang problems have presented it’s self in the recent weeks that may have been related (“One dead,” 2011, para. 6).

Response time is a concern in schools without police officers’ presence. There is a delay in response time, and families with victims of bullying probably want answers.

Also, this may create a concern for losing trust with both school officials and law enforcement agencies. The ultimate purpose of school district policing is to create a rapid response time, eliminating delays, deter criminal activities, and educate students, teachers, administrators, and parents. This will avoid extracting municipality agencies as they are working to maintain beat integrity, and will allow agencies to provide the highest level of community policing possible. School district policing will allow police officers to respond to all school related incidents and create a disposition within a reasonable amount of time.

Uniformed police officers in schools is an approach to provide community policing. Often, the mere presence of law enforcement can assist in intercepting potential problems upon arrival on school campuses. They can also monitor the safety of all customers working and learning while on school campuses and their premises. Board meetings are held monthly to make decisions, and the presence of law enforcement during the decision-making process can assist in maintaining order while popular and unpopular decisions are finalized. Board meetings are the same as town hall meetings and have a direct impact on the organization's daily operations. Unpopular decisions draw the most attention from the community and, at times, unwelcome remarks are made that create stress for the board members and their audience. School board members want to feel secure while working for their stakeholders, customers, and their communities.

Gang violence has always been a concern for law enforcement for many years. Today, gangs have made their presence known to municipalities, counties, and school districts policing. Law enforcement in schools are an enhanced resource for school

officials. The treatment of innocence bystanders are a concern for most school administration and parents today, and students attend schools in good faith with the intent of advancing their educational career. Through law enforcement intervention and knowledge of gang activity, this will help reduce the violence and maintain a healthy learning environment with the assistance of their school administrators. Today, law enforcement agencies are partnering to share information and to gain knowledge of each gang and strategies to reduce the number of gang members.

Bullying is not new to school officials, bullying has drawn more attention to school personnel due to the recent incidents that have attracted attention across the world. In the past, students have bullied each other and continued to play with very little distraction. Today, students are taking a different direction with bullying. There are students in the school systems that are afraid of bullying and have made serious attempts to commit suicide. This has drawn attention worldwide in recent years and has placed a demand for intervention on the community and school system. This is where law enforcement can assist. With their mere presence and being in their uniform and by making classroom visits for presentations on bullying, school law enforcement can help students feel safer.

The mere presence of law enforcement assigned to school campuses is a deterrent for criminal activity and a resource that make the working environment a more comfortable place to work. When unwelcome intruders know police officers are assigned to school campuses, there is a hesitation with their criminal activities, not only for intruders but for students attending school on a daily basis. Potential suspects know a response to their criminal or mischievous activities is only seconds or a few minutes

away. This will cause a deterrent to criminal activity to know a police officer is assigned to their targets and to know the police officer may be working in the same location as their targets.

COUNTER POSITION

Opposition believes that law enforcement agencies should not be in schools. For example, the “Northside Independent School District community launched a protest against school police officers carrying guns” (Kaba, 2011, para. 1). The protesters called for district police officers to give up their guns in the wake of a teen’s shooting death (Kaba, 2011).

Another reason why school districts should implement law enforcement agencies is because the Los Lunas school system believes that waiting for assistance could cause fatalities versus supplying police officers guns to act immediately. Communities are constantly concentrating on students carrying firearms in schools but neglect recognizing the safety hazard of trespassers on school grounds. School police officers’ primary concern is creating a safe learning environment and gaining trust amongst the student body and communities; however, trespassers are a concern for students, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement agencies. Los Lunas school system acknowledged, “kids with guns aren’t the only worry for one school district, what about people from the outside? School Law enforcement agency in Los Lunas will soon be packing heat to protect students” (Tomlin, 2011, para. 1).

Local agencies are assigned beats and may encounter calls for service that require additional time for clearing, but incidents taking place on school campuses may not allow a waiting period, such as the gunman in Florida attending a school district

board meeting. Police officers carrying a gun in schools are actually for the protection of students and teachers against trespassers. First responders are the eyes and ears for local agencies, and this allows time for proper deployment of necessary law enforcement manpower. This may also lead to stopping additional activities that take place like the violent incidents discussed earlier.

Another reason why the public should not fear guns is because the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education requires each police officer to qualify with their duty weapon on an annual basis. Each commission has standardized lesson plans that meet each requirement satisfying the needs of the commission and their agencies throughout the United States (“General Course Numbers,” n.d.). Moreover, upon completion of their academic course work, patrol tactics and other trainings are mandated year after year. In the commission’s training listing, there are courses that enhance school district policing skills and performance. There are courses such as Child Abuse, Use of Force, Spanish for Law Enforcement, Ethics, Firearms Proficiency, Racial Profiling, and others to ensure school police officers are highly trained and equipped for the assignment. These are not limited to officers of municipalities, counties, and state policing. According to the Arkansas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training (CLEST) (“Office of Law Enforcement Standards,” n.d.), “All applicants for law enforcement positions must meet the requirements established by CLEST and complete CLEST approved training to obtain their certification” (para. 1).

Firearm training is mandatory in law enforcement, and most agencies may qualify annually or semi-annually depending on the agency. When in doubt with firearms being

carried in schools, district police officers are credible like municipalities, counties, and state sworn peace officers. A very good source to refer to is each state's law enforcement commission. Many incidents that occur in the communities have a great chance of overlapping into the schools which means students are at risk with unforeseen criminal activities; moreover, school district police officers will have the opportunity of bridging the gap with local municipality and county agencies. What this means is that each agency can now work together through collaboration and teamwork to expand law enforcement support in communities. Collaborating with each other will enhance patrol tactics, investigations, educations, and community involvement. Furthermore, over a number of years, citizens will find that there are a minimum of loopholes in community crime watches, which is the golden purposes of school district policing.

Another reason why law enforcement agencies should be in schools is that police officers are issued distinguished uniforms that have an impact on criminal activities across America. The primary role of school district police officers is patrolling the premises to enhance a safe learning environment and monitor criminal trespassing, disorderly conduct, acts of vandalism. Officers work with local agencies and collaborate with the community in different areas, such as civic clubs, city councils, student groups, and educating teachers and parents. According to Russouw (n.d.), "prior to 1994, the image of the police was not at all user-friendly. For many years, the police were viewed as a paramilitary organization" (para. 12).

School district policing and guns has drawn a major concern for many citizens; moreover, the presence of police officers in schools can paint the picture of paramilitary

appearance. However, police officers in schools are capable of bridging gaps with municipality law enforcement agencies, which eliminates loopholes in community coverage. This coverage includes places where students walk, ride their bikes, skate to school, and utilize other forms of transportation to and from home. Although some may think police officers create the prison or paramilitary appearance, it really does not. School district policing's primary concerns is to enhance the educational process that promotes a healthy educational life for students.

Another reason why school district police officers should be in schools is that they are more than just peace officers. These officers will play more than just one role with the students, teachers, parents, and school communities on a daily basis. Developing funds through the United States government to reduce crime through proactive and intervention policing in schools has an impact on creating a safe learning environment. There are many different ways to approach this task; however, a hands-on has a direct impact, such as Real Man Program, or through intervention programs, such as Railroad Safety and Crime Stoppers. School officers can also educate parents on crime reduction as reinforcement. School district police officers are also capable of talking with student groups as they prepare for their college careers.

RECOMMENDATION

School district law enforcement agencies should partner with municipalities and county or parish law enforcement agencies due to the impact it has on bridging the gap for community policing, providing more in-depth information on community incidents, and bridging the gap between schools, communities, city councils, and students of all ages. School district policing is a unique style of law enforcement that consists of public

relations, mentors, mother and father figures, counselors, friends, and leaders. Many hats will be worn that will assist school officials in educating the most important citizens in America: the students. Another reason why school district police officers should be in schools is that “Crime Stoppers may be one the best resources to control crime on school campus. Moreover, Student Crime Stoppers is a popular resource on school campuses especially in the secondary schools” (“Statistics,” n.d.).

Student Crime: Stoppers	1994-Present	Year-to-date
Cases Solved	603	15
Arrests Made	611	16
Administrative Action	624	16
Property Recovered	\$151,669	\$835
Narcotics Recovered	\$38,891	\$625
Weapons(Firearms)	48	1
Total Calls	1,193	37
Rewards Paid	\$46,460	\$1,500

Figure 1. Statistics of Student Reported Crime to Student Crime Stoppers

Clearly shown are that homicides and other crime take place within the community and the same activities taking place in the communities can very well take place on school campus. Student Crime works and stops criminal activity from occurring on campuses. This shows that it takes more than just the police or school officials to operate a school; it takes a neighborhood to raise a child, and it takes a community to operate a school.

Presentations on bullying, gang involvement, and school shootings is a major contribution to reducing crime. Presentations open the doors for students and parents by allowing an opportunity to elaborate on concerns regarding criminal and non-criminal

activity on the campuses; moreover, students have more insight on activity, and they are the eyes and ears on school campuses. Crime Stoppers is one of the most popular methods for reporting incidents and remaining anonymous on a daily basis; this is a resource police officers can utilize to ensure a safe learning environment. In many cases, students want to share information to law enforcement officials but simply do not know the correct avenue in sharing confidential information. The majority of students may want to remain anonymous due to possible retaliation by the subject. Additionally, the police officer's primary responsibility is maintaining a safe learning environment through positive intervention and reducing the fear of retaliation and threats.

Another positive reason police should be in schools today is the Real Men Read Program. This is a program school district police officers will support in an effort to support mentorship. Imagine second graders having a police officer reading to their class once a month; this officer may read and place emphasis on duties and responsibilities at the students' homes; this alone will have a major impact on their performance in school and at home. Take this a step further with a police officer passing out school supplies such as coloring books, pencils, stickers, and allowing the students to offer feedback on their personal goals in life. School district police officers are role models to school-aged students. This is the time to focus on the future; school-aged students are watching and looking for someone to admire. Police officers are great role models in this stage of their lives.

School violence has grabbed the attention of citizens more today than in the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s. Educating students need to not only happen in the classroom but outside the classroom as well. Also, the educational process should not stop with

students; school district police officers should reach out to the students' guardians as well for reinforcement. Training is an on-going process for all law enforcement agencies, and as society changes, the training model will change to accommodate the needs of the communities in which police officers serve.

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